

# HOUSING IN SCOTLAND, 24.11.14

**Luke Henderson, Edinburgh RiC Housing Working Group**

The subject of housing can often seem like an un-sexy subject and not something that appears to be to important.

Maslow created a hierarchy of human need, at the top of the hierarchy are those things essential for life and as you progress down the hierarchy there are things necessary to improve the quality of life.

The top of the hierarchy are the Physiological requirements for life; these include air, water and food required for metabolic sustenance but also included are clothing and shelter.

This emphasises what a fundamental need housing is, yet the reality under capitalism is that the human need for housing has been distorted into the greed.

There are 3 common groups of housing providers; Public (council housing), private (housing associations and private landlords) and owner occupiers.

It seems hard to believe but back in 1979 when Thatcher first came to power the majority of housing in Scotland was council housing. This source of cheap and flexible accommodation has been decimated so that it now represents a safety net only, and a not very good safety net. The right to buy has reduced the stock and the government has stolen tenants rent money (Daylight Robbery and latterly Moonlight Robbery, See Defend Council Housing website) leaving councils indebted.

There could readily be a new generation of council housing built and it would be useful if the economics group of RiC could look into the economic and proposed the to the Smith Commission into the devolution process the necessary changes required.

Owner occupier accommodation is often sold as the pinnacle of housing but the reality is that instead of liberating the owner it act as a shackle around their neck. The value of the house is tied up in the house, it is expensive to move, and you are tied to that one location; meaning I personally have a 1 hour commute twice a day to my work in Alloa.

Private rented accommodation by Housing Associations (HA's) has in Scotland traditionally been provided by small locally owned and fairly democratic HA's but the realities of the system means that they are being gobbled up by vast HA's owning that dominate the market owning more than 100,000 homes and lacking accountability..

The worst form of accommodation is that provided by small landlords who rent individual homes out. They represent what classic Marxist would call the petit Bourgeoisie- For them 1 or 2 houses are is often seen as an investment, every penny they have to spend on the house is seen as a penny lost (often leading to poor conditions), they provide a poor service to the occupants as they see it as an investment and not a business that requires time and energy, they do not understand the law (which to be fair is pretty complex) and so often end up attempting to evict tenants illegally.

It is not people on benefits who scam benefit payments but landlords who put out a pint of milk and a packet of cereal and then claim they are providing breakfast to tenants.

Unfortunately this form of housing provision is the one most favoured by governments.

The Scottish government is currently consulting on private rented accommodation and to I strongly recommend that you look up the Living Rent Campaign.

<https://www.facebook.com/livingrentcampaign>

<http://www.livingrent.org/>

## **ii) Andy Ashe Living Rent Campaign**

The LRC has the support of the NUS (Scotland) and ACORN (Scotland)

The Scottish government is currently consulting the public about private housing rents. They have sent out a 17 question consultation paper.

The LRC supports:-

### **a) Rent controls.**

The UK had one of the least regulated housing sectors in the EU. Recently private rents in Aberdeen have risen by 40% and in Edinburgh by 17%.

### **b) Easier for tenants to get out**

Most tenants are tied in to 12 month contracts. In Germany tenants are only required to give 6 week's notice

### **c) Ending of current evictions system**

Landlords can evict tenants without giving a reason. This needs to be ended.

Landlords are pushing hard to get the Scottish government to bow to their demands. We need thousands to push the LRC demands. 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2015, is the last day for the government's consultation.

Glasgow and Aberdeen RIC members have also become involved.

**There is to be a demonstration outside Holyrood on Thursday, December 18<sup>th</sup> at 13.00**

The LRC can be accessed on Twitter, Facebook and Website

**<https://www.facebook.com/livingrentcampaign>  
<http://www.livingrent.org/>**

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## Discussion

**Duncan** – We managed to stop the council privatising its housing stock. There are still 20,000 council houses in Edinburgh. The anti-BedroomTax campaign was also a success.

The Housing Allowance does not cover Edinburgh's high rents. The only answer is to push for a House Building Programme. There is an analogy with the Fuel Poverty Campaign.

**Willie** – A big problem lies in the fragmentation of housing provision. This has been part of the neo-liberal agenda.

All social housing should be of high quality. In Pilton there was a meeting with Margaret Burgess. The architect, Malcolm Fraser is designing new colony-type housing. There is a demand for 35,000 houses in Edinburgh. This will require many years of campaigning. We need a housing vision.

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Fixed rent controls do not really address the problem of the market in housing. We have a post-code problem, with differential rents according to the desirability of an area.

What is needed is a fundamental shift where people don't think of housing in terms of them being a financial asset.

**Jane** – Housing is often seen as an investment rather than a home.

**Michael** – The provision of new student housing has shown that quality is possible without much effort.

**Bob** - In the early 198's he was a member of a very different Labour Party. They supported a massive house building programme with rents eventually reduced to zero. Housing, like health, was seen as a human right.

**Ian** – Housing is a strategically important issue. Getting accommodation is a major problem for young people. Campaigning on this issue can help us to win people over to independence. The government keeps on talking about "political reality". Rent control is an issue that needs to be addressed. Perhaps the Economics Working Group could produce something on Housing.

**Pat** - We need both education and propaganda. Maybe RIC needs to produce a pamphlet.

**Stephen** – Student rents are at a ridiculously high level. This frequently leads to overcrowding. It appears that there is some government push to get housing companies to build more student accommodation in their effort to make Edinburgh a student city.

**Luke** –A real problem is the debt that is attached to housing provision. Councils are not allowed to borrow. We need to undermine the notion of the housing for the market. Yes, this would be a good issue for the Economics Working Group to address.

**Andy** – We should press for some of the profits being made by housing companies being awarded contracts by the government or city to be allocated to social housing.

There is also the problem of social cleansing highlighted by the mothers from the London-based Focus E14 campaign who spoke at the RIC conference. Social cleansing is also going on in Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

In the Netherlands there are very strict rent controls. Housing associations are outdoing the Private Sector. Social housing is seen as desirable.

There is also the new Land Reform Act. Local communities can also take control of land in the cities. Then the problem becomes planning permission.